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"THE COBDEN CLUB AND THE AMERICAN FARMER."

ADDRESS

OF

HON. GEORGE B. LORING,

President of the New England Agricultural Society,

AT THE

OPENING OF THE SEVENTEENTH ANNUAL FAIR,

HELD AT

WORCESTER, MASS., SEPTEMBER 7, 8, 9, AND 10, 1880.

GENTLEMEN OF THE SOCIETY:—In opening this Seventeenth Annual Exhibition of the New England Agricultural Society, I am sure I should fail to express the most cordial sentiment of your hearts, did I not promptly and warmly extend our gratitude to the local association which has now for the third time invited us to co-operate with them, in this pr[illegible]al mode of teaching and encouraging the industry which we represent. The Worcester A[illegible]ural Society, one of the oldest in our country, occupies the classic ground of agricultural [illegible]ought and investigation. Whatever suggestions have served to develop the art of tilling the soil, and are accepted by the farmer as a guide to his occupation, seem to have found here an early and authoritative utterance. The useful maxims of the fathers found an early expression here; and their successful practice was displayed most conspicuously on these hills and in these valleys. Nowhere in our Commonwealth, perhaps nowhere in our country, have the various systems which constitute the agriculture of America, been better represented than here; and nowhere can we find better illustrations of the diverse wants and necessities which give vital force to this industry under all the various soils and climates, and social and industrial conditions to be found in our country. When the Worcester Agricultural Society was founded, sixty-two years ago, this large, prosperous, and thriving city was but a village, situated in the heart of a strong and vigorous agricultural community. The founders of the society were not only the leading civilians of this county, but they were also the leading farmers. Their homesteads were scattered far and wide over this landscape; their well-tilled lands, lying all along these slopes, gave evidence of their skill and thrift as cultivators of the soil. Their wants were few, their means

were small. The surplus products of their farms found their way slowly to a neighboring market; and they secured a satisfactory reward for their labor in supplying the local demand for those agricultural staples which now enter into our domestic and foreign commerce, and give value to new and remoter fields. Within a radius of fifty miles lay every opportunity which the farmer of that day had to traffic in the products of his farm; and that radius was more difficult to cover than is now the wide and diversified stretch from this spot to the Mississippi, with all its obstacles. The home market was simple and limited; the foreign market was unopened. Manufactures were, until nearly that time, largely conducted in the household, and were mostly confined to the wants of the family; the products of foreign looms and foreign soils were deemed of small importance, and were but little used; and it was to develop and encourage the almost universal calling of a strong, and independent, and thoughtful, and intelligent community, that the wise and able men of Worcester organized this society of practical and inquiring farmers, who pursued their calling with unwearied diligence, with the rudest implements and the simplest processes.

But in our day the whole scene here has changed. The growth of a small rural village into a populous and busy manufacturing city, connected with the seaboard on the one hand, and with the remotest regions of this continent by rapid and easy transportation on the other, has created demands which must be supplied by larger, more active, and very different means. The business of supplying the daily needs of the households of this community forms a part of a vast internal commerce, which connects it with the broad grain-fields and the luxuriant pastures of the West. The great staples of agriculture are brought here from those regions which are necessarily and profitably dedicated to their production. It is not Worcester County grain and beef and pork which now fill your market, but the provisions and breadstuffs of broader lands, and a kindlier soil and climate. The rural village of sixty years ago has become the centre of a great traffic, engaged in supplying fifty thousand people of its own, and more than a hundred thousand in the municipalities which have clustered about it. Occupying a place among the great commercial emporiums, it stretches out its hands for its share of those commodities which occupy the channels of trade, and it sends forth as its own contribution, the products of its wonderful ingenuity and skill in all the mechanical and manufacturing arts, recognizing the necessity and value of the great agricultural regions of America, as they are now recognized by every industrious people who require to be fed, while they devote their fingers to that skilful service upon which man depends for his comforts and luxuries, and the ease and facility with which he performs his labor and establishes his intercourse with his fellow-man.

To the great producing sections of our country, Worcester stands in the same relation as Liverpool and Manchester. To the farmers in her own neighborhood she offers all the inducements which a populous centre can offer to the producers of all those articles, which enter into the immediate wants of a people, and cannot enter into commerce, and cannot bear long transportation. To the dairy, to the garden, to the cultivator of early crops, small fruits, hay, and the products of the orchard, an ample market is here opened, which offers a reward to these surrounding farms, unknown to them when they were devoted to simpler and more general work. It is not to be supposed that the founders of the local society then anticipated the great and radical change which has taken place since their day. They could not have foretold the ocean-defying steamship, and the land-defying railroad, and the time-defying telegraph. They could not have listened, amidst the quiet repose of their luxuriant farms, for the busy hum of this great city. But they performed their work well in their day and generation, and they set us an example of industry and foresight which we may well follow. And I am compelled to believe that they anticipated the time when the people of this country would be engaged in mutual industries for mutual support, and when the twelve millions of people of their day would become the fifty millions of our own, busy and consuming in the great commercial and manufacturing centres, busy and producing in the great agricultural regions, each industry leaning upon its fellow, and all united in establishing American supply for American markets, and regulating prices in accordance with the wants of American labor, and the value of active American capital. In the first address delivered before the Worcester Agricultural Society, by the Hon. Levi Lincoln, Jr., one of the distinguished sons of this town, afterwards a wise and able governor of this Commonwealth, and the dignified and patriarchal citizen whose old age our own generation has delighted to honor, on Oct. 7, 1819, sixty-one years ago, I find the following remarkable passage:—

"I have thus far, gentlemen of the society, addressed my observations to you as to agriculturists only. There is another most important interest in the especial patronage of our institution,—a respectable and honorable class of members to whom on this occasion it becomes me to offer public respect. If agriculture be the life-blood of the people, the arts of manufacture constitute the real independence of the nation. We rejoice that the spirit of our citizens has risen superior to a reliance on foreign supply for the most necessary fabrics for personal use and household consumption; that the enterprise of manufacturers has extended almost to every article essential to our enjoyment; and that nobly persevering through difficulties, and triumphing over every discouragement, they have brought their workmanship into successful competition with that of the skilful and experienced artists of Europe. The embarrassments with which they have so severely conflicted are fast terminating; and a prospect of regular employment and reasonable profit is before them. With economy and industry in their establishments, skill and perfect fidelity in their manufactures, the sound policy of the government for their protection, and the patriotic encouragement of the people for their support, they now have the highest

assurances of permanency and prosperity in their interests. Manufactures and agriculture are congenial pursuits, and naturally contribute to the aid and success of each other. Under the good auspices of our happy country, God grant they may be cherished and long flourish together."

The policy foreshadowed by the wise and patriotic orator of that occasion has become the policy of this country, and its fruits are now before us. The devotion to the interests of our own country to which he appeals, has roused the active forces of our people, and has arrested the attention of the nations of the Old World, until our lands have become an irresistible attraction to all those who desire to cultivate profitably their own acres, and our mills have become a mine of fair compensation to the half-starved multitudes upon whose half-paid services the foreign manufacturer depends for his profit. Under this policy our mills and our farms have increased beyond computation. The effect of an active, industrious, prosperous manufacturing community engaged in producing all the fabrics to which cotton and wool and iron are adapted, is felt wherever an acre of land finds a cultivator, whether it be on the hillsides around our manufacturing towns, or in those purely agricultural sections upon which we depend for our staple supplies. Prosperous mills have made prosperous farms. A prosperous manufacturing community has assured the farmer that his labor shall not be in vain. And while the American manufacturer has been protected in American markets against an overwhelming tide of foreign importation, the American farmer has been provided with the profitable business of feeding a vast and growing population here, and with the patriotic business of pouring his products into foreign markets until the balance of trade is enormously in our favor, and the foundation of our financial success is securely laid; a policy which gives the American farmer and manufacturer alike the control of a home market, affords protection to both, and enables both to occupy so much of the foreign market as the wants of that market and their own surplus products require. And I trust the American farmer will be slow to believe that opening the American market to an influx of foreign manufactures, thus turning the balance of trade largely against us, and regulating the prices of the goods he consumes by the decrees of foreign manufacturers, will conduce to the financial prosperity of his country, or to his own comfort and economy. On this point I have no fears of those farmers whose local markets are found in the manufacturing towns. To the producers of agricultural staples, however, I have a word to say.

The recent attempts to rouse the jealousy of the "Western farmer of America," against the Eastern manufacturer, by publications of the Cobden Club, and by reported speeches recently made at a dinner of that club have been brought to my attention by the friends of free trade in England. I have read them with great care. The Cobden Club is an association organized, I presume, in the interest of the leading industries of Great Britain, and patriotically anxious to open the markets of America to an unlimited introduction of British manufactures,—a step very important I doubt not to a country which raises neither the food which its people consume nor the cotton which they spin, and whose chief exports are the products of its mills. In this service the Cobden Club does its work well. Encouraged by its civilities, an American citizen, the President of the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad, a gentleman who has been vastly enriched by the prosperity of a road engaged in transporting the agricultural products and coal of the West to the seaboard, and the manufactured cotton, wool and iron of the East to the Western markets, and is carrying back and forth a busy population engaged in these industries, an especial recipient of the fruits of American prosperity, was induced to say at a dinner of the Club: "The agricultural interests are represented by half the population of the country, and those interests appreciate the great economies that will accrue to them, not only in the cost of the goods imported, but by the introduction of competition with domestic manufacture, instead of sustaining needlessly high costs through the present excessive protection rates. They recognize that whilst helping the consumers of their products abroad through the increase of foreign manufactures they will get that portion of American manufactures used by them at greatly reduced prices." This solicitude for the foreign consumer, and this deliberate disregard of the interests of American manufacturers, would hardly be expected of one who takes especial care to tax the moving and transporting population of the United States with a shewd regard for the railroad interests of the country, in which he has so conspicuous a share. But he would have found all his solicitude removed, if he had left that dinner-table and had entered the retail stores of Liverpool, or Manchester, or Birmingham, to make purchases for the tariff-ridden farmers of America. He would have found cotton goods and cotton fabrics, boots and shoes, axes, forks, spades, shovels, hoes, harrows, ploughs, rakes, cultivators, reapers, mowers, carts, wagons, tinware, glassware, almost everything except woollen goods and iron, dearer in England than in America. Had he entered the warehouses of a larger trade, moreover, he would have found that only the manufacture of steel rails in America reduced their price to the American consumer, who prior to that time paid a hundred and forty dollars a ton for English rails against sixty dollars, the present price of American rails. And had he looked a little further, with his anxiety for the American farmer, he would have found that on English rails at English prices it cost sixty cents a bushel to transport wheat from Chicago to Philadelphia, whereas the present rate on American rails is only seventeen cents. Can it be possible that the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad prefers the costly English rail with an excessive and oppressive transportation-tariff, to an inexpensive American rail with low and easy rates of transportation, and expects the farmers to accept this as an act of kindly consideration for their interests?

But this extraordinary position assumed by one of our own prosperous citizens is more than matched by an English author, Mr. Mongredien, who, under the auspices of the Cobden Club

appeals to the Western farmer and endeavors to show him that he is not only neglected but oppressed by the tariff policy of the American government. To the charge of neglect let me say to the Western farmer that his industry is protected almost to the exclusion of foreign competitors, and that he finds in the home market a demand for more than ninety per cent. of all he produces—leaving out cotton and tobacco. The duty on all animals, except for breeding purposes, is twenty per cent.; on wool, from ten to twelve cents per pound, and from ten to twelve per cent. added; on sugar, from two to five cents per pound; on corn, ten cents per bushel; on barley, fifteen cents; on wheat, twenty cents; on oats, ten cents; on butter and cheese, four cents per pound; on tobacco-leaf, unmanufactured, thirty-five cents per pound—on manufactured, fifty cents. To the American farmer there is secured not only his home market by the care of the government and the demands of the manufacturing community, but he finds for all he exports the best markets in the world. Protected as he is at home, he is enabled to pursue his industry with energy and advantage, and to avail himself of all markets open to him. Let the Western farmer remember that under the care of government the clip of wool in this country has risen from 60,000,000 pounds in 1860, to 250,000,000 in 1879; and that in our advancing agriculture we now have devoted to wheat, 50,170 square miles; to corn, 80,610; to oats, 20,500; to barley, 2,810; to hay, 42,080; to potatoes, 2,635; to rye, 2,635; our corn and wheat alone covering a larger area than the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland. And this has been accomplished through the demands of a home market—a market constantly and steadily increasing, and destined to increase with still greater rapidity as our manufactures multiply and extend, as they are now extending, to every section of our country. It is for a market which consumes more than ninety per cent. of our agricultural products, that government exercises a fostering care. Shall the market be destroyed, to propitiate those who consume the remaining ten per cent.?

The condition of the cotton market in this country illustrates to a considerable degree the evil of being controlled by those who have no interests in common with their own. The cotton crop for the year ending Sept. 1, 1880, is about 5,500,000 bales. Of this England takes about 2,700,000 bales, the Continent of Europe about 1,300,000 bales, and the United States the balance,—1,500,000. It is impossible to tell the extent to which the production of cotton may be carried. But I think it must be evident to every one interested in the matter that the American market would be kept in a more healthy condition if the amount consumed here approached more nearly the amount produced, and America with her multiplied mills controlled the market price of her own product.

The unfounded assertion made by Mr. Mongredien for the Cobden Club, that the American farmers are paying $340,000,000 annually as a tribute to the American manufacturers, on account of the protective tariff, deserves only a passing notice. An ingenious attempt to create ill-feeling and jealousy between the producing classes of a community is never wise. That the duties imposed on cotton and woollen goods enable the American manufacturer to occupy largely the market in this country is indeed true. But it by no means follows that this is done to the wrong and oppression of the consumer, or that the American farmer is compelled to make an expenditure for which he receives no equivalent. So true is this that Mr. Mongredien is forced, in order to sustain his proposition, to attack the capacity and skill and energy of the American manufacturers themselves; to suggest that "under the wholesale stimulus of open competition, the energy, activity, and shrewdness of their race would rapidly enable them to recover the ground they have lost under the enervating influence of the coddling system;" and to convey the idea that if our manufacturers knew more they would manufacture cheaper and better. I am not expected here to discuss elaborately the interests of American manufacturers. But as a representative of the farming community of this country, whose horses, and cattle, and oats, and lumber, and potatoes, and hay are protected against the horses, and cattle, and oats, and lumber, and potatoes, and hay, of Canada, and whose wool is protected against the wool of Australia, I insist that the manufacturers are entitled to the same care which we receive ourselves. I know not what the manufacturers of Europe could do for us; but I do know that to every cultivator of the soil here, to every man who has a home, the ingenuity and skill of American manufacturers offer all the comforts and adornments necessary to make that home desirable, at rates so low that the manufacturing machine seems to be a magician's wand. How cheaply are our people clothed for the service of life—how universally are they enabled to appear well-clad on all public occasions! We claim that we are the best educated people on earth; we may claim that we are the best dressed people also. For all our duties and for all occasions we have summoned unparalleled ingenuity and skill to make American life tasteful; and we have succeeded in producing a community, a home, an individual requiring no encouragement or aid from the economies of other communities or homes or people. Let it be understood by those who would lay down an industrial policy for us, that the occupant of these homes is clothed with duties and responsibilities which tax all his powers of mind and body. He is a citizen as well as a laborer; and he is not satisfied until his duties to society and the State are fulfilled, his children are educated, his home adorned, and he has contributed his share to support the religious and educational institutions about him. For him should the policy of this country be shaped; and not for a community with fewer duties and smaller responsibilities. Let the American farmer and manufacturer, then, go hand in hand, and let no theory or design divide them.

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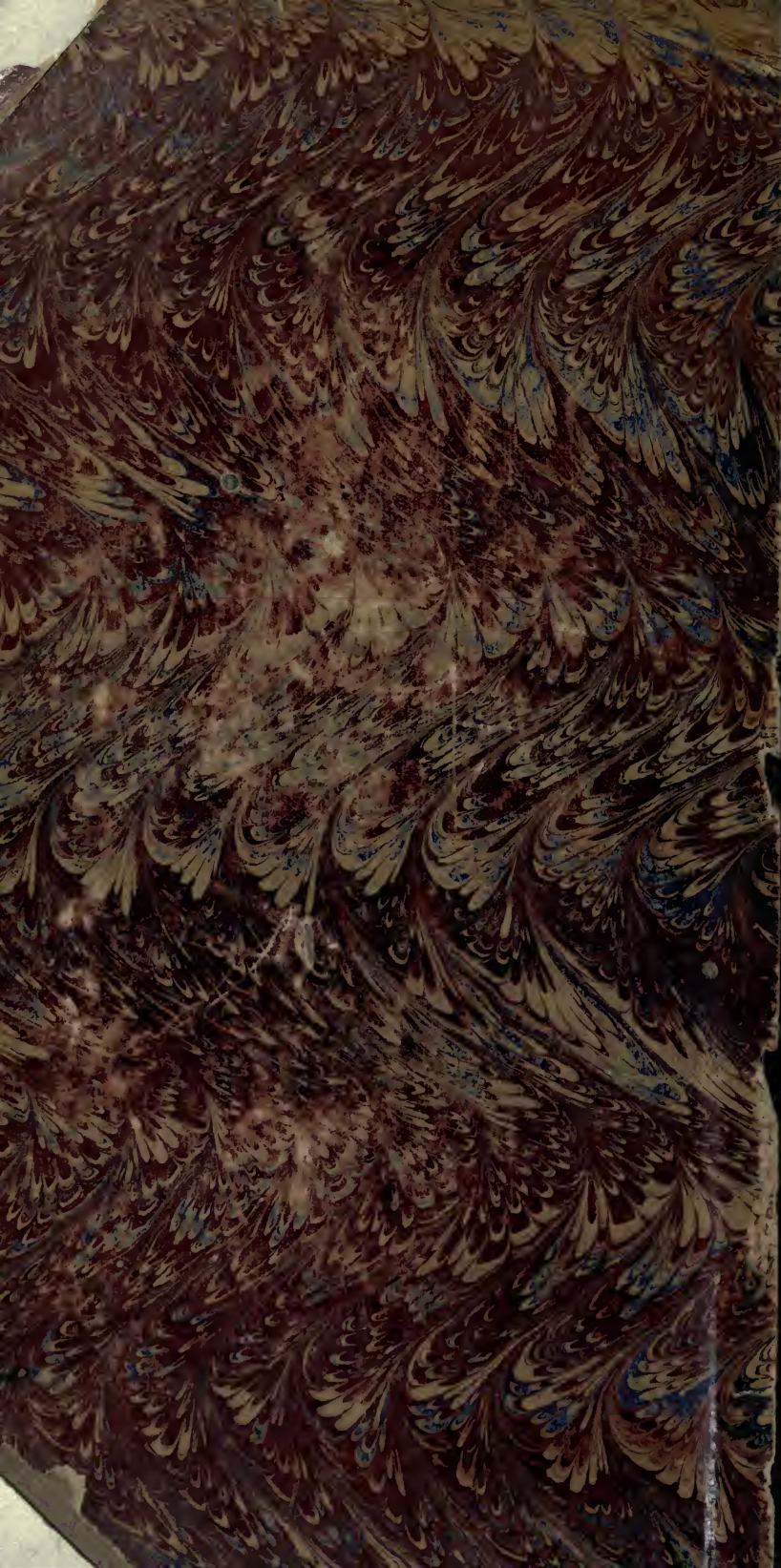
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